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G2AHKOO 1 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK 2 3 ISRAEL GAMERO, et al., Plaintiffs, 4 5 15 CV 2697 (KPF) V. 6 KOODO SUSHI CORP., et al., 7 Conference 8 Defendants. 9 New York, N.Y. 10 February 10, 2016 4:40 p.m. 11 Before: 12 HON. KATHERINE POLK FAILLA, 13 District Judge 14 APPEARANCES 15 MICHAEL FAILLACE & ASSOCIATES, P.C. 16 Attorneys for Plaintiffs BY: RAQUEL A. GUTIERREZ 17 MICHELLE KOO, Pro Se Defendant 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

1 (Case called)

THE COURT: When we were last together, which I think was in the fall, there were hopes, and they were mostly mine, that we might be able to resolve this case short of litigation. I do understand that those hopes were unduly optimistic on my part, and now we'll just go forward. But I guess what we could do is talk about discovery in this case, and I'm happy to do that. But I think there's a preliminary question which is directed to Ms. Gutierrez.

Ms. Gutierrez, right now there are how many individuals who have signed on, have opted in, to be plaintiffs? I have four on the page that I am looking at -- or three.

MS. GUTIERREZ: It should be three. And no one has opted in since we originally filed the complaint.

THE COURT: So it's Mr. Gamero, Mr. Mastranzo, and Mr. Sanchez; correct?

MS. GUTIERREZ: Correct.

THE COURT: As a first order of business, is it your contemplation that you would want to be moving for conditional certification of a collective action?

MS. GUTIERREZ: No.

THE COURT: We're sticking with those three?

MS. GUTIERREZ: We're past that stage, I think, yes.

THE COURT: I do understand. So then the issue is

discovery; correct?

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MS. GUTIERREZ: Correct.

THE COURT: Have the parties exchanged any discovery in the course of dealings in the fall?

MS. GUTIERREZ: Yes. Ms. Koo was kind enough to come to my office, actually, on more than one occasion to share with me some of the several items that she used to account for -- I would say how she paid and on what frequency she paid the plaintiffs in this case. It is, I would say, a somewhat unique system. Obviously, it's not something that I've -- it's not a neat kind of Excel spreadsheet, or anything like that. just wanted to have a conversation with your Honor about if this case does go forward to trial, having a date by which anything which she intends to use and anything that we intend to use just be turned over, seeing as how I don't think the more formal interrogatory and deposition process is necessarily going to be fruitful considering that Ms. Koo is pro se. actually handed over, I believe, document requests. They are lengthy. And, ultimately, I just kind of want to know what she would use at trial, just to simplify it.

THE COURT: I understand. Are you suggesting, then, rather than have a formal case management plan, we, the three of us, talk about what's out there to be produced and what can be produced?

MS. GUTIERREZ: Yes, that would be helpful.

1 THE COURT: Have you produced items to Ms. Koo in the course of this case? 2 3 MS. GUTIERREZ: I don't think I ended up turning over 4 any. I don't have that much. Whatever I have, I will 5 certainly turn over, but I don't believe I got to that. I 6 think I was just more curious to see what systems she had in 7 place. 8 THE COURT: Sure. What are your tangible items, your 9 documents and tangible items? Are there pay stubs or copies of 10 documents that your clients have? 11 MS. GUTIERREZ: If anything, it would be something 12 akin to maybe a receipt or -- because they were paid in cash. 13 So there's not much to show on their end. I'm just trying to 14 remember if there was anything more specific, like an envelope 15 or anything, but I don't think there's much on our end, to be 16 honest. 17 THE COURT: Is there, for example, any sort of chart 18 that you put together upon speaking with your clients to figure 19 out quite how much you believe they're owed? 20 MS. GUTIERREZ: Yes, there's a damages calculation. 21 THE COURT: Has that been shared? 22 MS. GUTIERREZ: That's been shared. 23 THE COURT: I don't certainly want to invade attorney 24 work product, but are there other things on that order that you

think would be useful to share with Ms. Koo? Because that

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damages chart wouldn't necessarily come in at trial as an exhibit. I don't know that it qualifies.

MS. GUTIERREZ: Right.

THE COURT: But it's something that is useful.

MS. GUTIERREZ: Nothing else, really, just the chart and any kind of, for lack of a better word, paper tidbits or something that we got from the plaintiffs; but I don't think it's extensive.

THE COURT: Are you going to depose Ms. Koo in this matter?

MS. GUTIERREZ: Ms. Koo and I have had very candid conversations. I don't think that a deposition would necessarily -- I don't think that this case would benefit from a deposition the way another case might if they're represented by counsel. So, no, I can safely say I'm not going to depose Ms. Koo.

THE COURT: Are there other third parties whom you would want to depose in this matter?

MS. GUTIERREZ: No, not that I know of at this time.

THE COURT: Let me talk to Ms. Koo for a while, and then I'll get right back to you. Thank you.

Ms. Koo, good afternoon. I want to make sure you understand what we've just been talking about, so let me take a little time to do that. And I'm sorry to the extent you know all of this already.

MS. KOO: Okay.

THE COURT: At this stage in the matter, after the complaint has been filed, after you've appeared -- and has Ms. Koo answered? Is there an answer on record for her?

MS. GUTIERREZ: There is an answer.

THE COURT: Excellent. The next stage in the case is what's known commonly as discovery. And the idea of discovery is that the parties share with each other the information that they believe is relevant to the issues in the case. There may be some things that are kept back. For instance, if you had hired an attorney and you and your attorney sat up one night putting something together, maybe that wouldn't be produced, and you wouldn't have to speak about your conversations with your attorney. But in the main —

MS. KOO: I don't have an attorney.

THE COURT: I know. That's what I'm saying. I'm giving you just a hypothetical. I'm sorry. Maybe that was confusing, so I won't do that again.

MS. KOO: Okay. Okay.

THE COURT: The issue is the documents and the items that you have that you would use if this case were to go to trial is what you ought to be producing. So I believe that you've shown a lot of these materials to Ms. Gutierrez. I know you've had a lot of conversations with her. I appreciate, on both sides, the professionalism, the cordiality, the civility,

which I hope has characterized your communications. But what I'm trying to make sure is that there are no surprises here.

So what you saw me discussing with Ms. Gutierrez is, to the extent she has things that she's going to use at trial, she's got to show them to you. She's got to give them to you. I don't know what those things are. If she had, for example, a copy of a receipt. If, for example -- and I don't think this happened -- Mr. Gamero went home every time you gave him cash and photocopied the cash and had a record of or had some other way of documenting it, then, yes, they ought to show that to you. But, really, she's probably going to have very little. In these cases, oftentimes plaintiffs have very little. If you have records, you need to show them to her.

MS. KOO: Yeah, I did.

THE COURT: You did. So have you shown her --

MS. KOO: It has their name; has the hour they working.

THE COURT: Yes.

MS. KOO: And on the same day of all the tips, how to pay them, and they signed their name on it.

THE COURT: You've given this to Ms. Gutierrez to look at?

MS. KOO: Yes, yes.

THE COURT: Ms. Gutierrez, do you have a copy of all these things?

MS. GUTIERREZ: Yes. As I mentioned, I do have copies of several items. I just kind of wanted to do a kind of catch-all of if she knows what she's going to use, put it all in one place, because we did have several meetings where one meeting's receipts -- you brought some receipts and the next meeting there were some envelopes. So just anything else that she might use.

THE COURT: Of course.

Ms. Koo, if you've got anything at home or in your office that relates to your employment of these gentlemen that you have not shown to Ms. Gutierrez, could you show it to her and let her copy it. Is there anything else out there that you can think of that you might not have given to her?

MS. KOO: I think with different hours, they pay by each week.

THE COURT: Yes.

MS. KOO: And they pay tips every single day.

THE COURT: Yes.

MS. KOO: Every single day has a paper this thick with their sales together, with their name, with how much they get tips. And every single day.

THE COURT: Yes. My question is all of those documents you've given to Ms. Gutierrez?

MS. KOO: I give to her all of what she request. Like the first day they started working and all of those things and

1 the first payroll. 2 THE COURT: Yes. 3 MS. KOO: I have all of those things. 4 THE COURT: Let me ask the question this way: Any 5 paper, any document that you have relating to any of these 6 three gentlemen, have you shown that to Ms. Gutierrez? 7 MS. KOO: There's tons of them. THE COURT: I don't know if that's a yes or no to my 8 9 question. Is the answer no? 10 MS. KOO: Anything she request, I give to her. 11 THE COURT: Okay. 12 MS. KOO: But anything related to this, there's tons 13 of them, so many years over there. 14 THE COURT: I see. 15 MS. KOO: You know, before it's only -- before 2013, they have a flood; they have damage something. But I think 16 17 most of them is after this. And I have every single day over 18 there, just like so many boxes. 19 THE COURT: All right. Ms. Gutierrez, were you aware 20 of this before this? 21 MS. GUTIERREZ: Yes. I guess I should have phrased 22 I know that there's actually a wealth of paperwork that 23 I haven't seen that is similar to and relates to what I have

I see.

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seen.

THE COURT:

1 MS. GUTIERREZ: It is just a lot for her to, 2 obviously, carry and bring to my office or even copy all at 3 once. 4 THE COURT: Yes. 5 MS. GUTIERREZ: That's why I was trying -- I would 6 like to just streamline it that if she were to present 7 evidence, what would she show. 8 THE COURT: Now I understand that. Thank you. 9 Ms. Koo, I was misguided. Now I understand it. Can 10 we agree that if there is any paper that you have not shown to 11 Ms. Gutierrez that you would want to show to a jury or to me at 12 trial, that you will give it to her to make a copy of? 13 MS. KOO: Not really. 14 THE COURT: Wait. I'm sorry. Why not? Maybe I'm not 15 asking the question the right way. Let's say there's a trial in this case. 16 17 MS. KOO: Okay. 18 THE COURT: And let's say in defending your case, you 19 want to show a piece of paper to me. 20 MS. KOO: Okay. 21 THE COURT: Before you do that, you're going to show 22 her first; correct? 23 MS. KOO: Yeah. 24 THE COURT: What I'm saying is think about -- I know

you've got many, many boxes and many, many documents. What I'm

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asking you to think about is if you want to use any of that information in this case, if you want to use any of that information in a trial in this case, then get it together and give her a copy of it or give it to her to copy.

MS. KOO: Sure, sure.

THE COURT: Can you make the decision in the next 30 days as to anything you might want to use in this case? Is that too soon a period of time? Is that enough time?

MS. KOO: I don't know what should I need.

THE COURT: Of course.

MS. KOO: What I told her is anything you want, you let me know. So I go home digging -- me and my daughter digging for everything, take it out; give to her. She make a copy; I bring home. That's all I was doing.

THE COURT: I understand that. What she's done, I'm sure, is think about what she would need to prove her case or to at least give her information about the issues on her side of the case. What I'm saying is if you have decided or if you do decide to put anything in at trial other than that information —

MS. KOO: No, no.

THE COURT: -- you got to let us know what it is.

MS. KOO: No, I don't think I have anything.

THE COURT: Okay.

MS. KOO: Only the paper I give to her and similar

things like that.

THE COURT: Sure. Can I ask you, please, to think about it for 30 days.

MS. KOO: Okay.

THE COURT: And if there's anything else you want to put into this case, you'll tell us both; okay?

MS. KOO: Okay. Sure. No problem.

THE COURT: Then we give you 30 days for that.

Now, the next thing is sometimes in these cases there are things called interrogatories or requests for admissions. Yes, you're puzzled and you should be, and that's okay. I don't think we're going to need those here. You guys have had enough conversations. I think you understand each side's position. So I am telling you, Ms. Koo, that sometimes some attorneys, not usually pro se litigants but they can, file interrogatories. Interrogatories are simply questions: Tell me about this. Tell me about this. I believe, based on our conversations, that you and Ms. Gutierrez have already discussed everything and that neither one of you has any reluctance to ask each other questions. So I don't think you need interrogatories. I just want to make sure you know that they exist.

MS. KOO: Okay.

THE COURT: There is something called requests for admission. You tell the other side: Admit that something

happened on a certain day. Admit that this person did something. I don't think you need that either, but I'm not going to tell you. I'm just letting you know it's something that is out there, but I believe that you have had all the discussions with Ms. Gutierrez, so I think you know her position on things.

The last thing is depositions. A deposition is a proceeding where you or someone is asked questions while you're under oath, and there's a court reporter or a tape recorder nearby taking it down. I have had cases where the parties don't use depositions; I have had cases where they do. I've just talked with Ms. Gutierrez, and to make clear, it is her view that she does not need to depose you in this case because you've had all of these conversations and because you've exchanged the documents.

MS. KOO: Yes.

THE COURT: And she doesn't need to depose anybody else in the case.

MS. KOO: Okay.

THE COURT: If you want to take a deposition of someone, then we ought to talk about that. You don't have to, but you can. If you do, I'm not going to tell you what to do, of course, but sometimes people find it easier to do depositions by just writing out questions and having the other side respond rather than actually being face to face in a room.

What I'm also going to ask you to do is, in this 30-day period that I'm giving you, decide if you want to take depositions. Again, you don't have to. I want to make you aware that this is a thing that exists. On day 30, you're going to write me a letter and you're going to write

Ms. Gutierrez a letter. You're going to give it to both of us.

MS. KOO: Okay.

THE COURT: You're going to tell me if there are any other documents or materials that you want to use and if there are any depositions you want to take or anything else you want to do with respect to discovery.

MS. KOO: Okay.

THE COURT: Does that make sense?

MS. KOO: Yes.

THE COURT: Then when I get that letter, then I'm going to know that we have all of our materials or we don't have all of our materials.

MS. KOO: Okay.

THE COURT: Ms. Gutierrez, let me ask you this: Is this a bench trial or a jury trial? And/or are you changing your mind?

MS. GUTIERREZ: No, I think we have not requested a jury. I don't believe Ms. Koo has requested a jury. So a bench trial would be fine.

THE COURT: On some level that makes sense.

Ms. Koo, let me explain what we're talking about. There are different types of trials, and not every statute provides for the ability to have a jury hear your case. Even when it does, sometimes people prefer to have cases presented to the judge. Right now, the way things stand -- and I'm going to confirm this, but I think that is probably the way it will stand -- is that neither one of you has asked to have a jury hear your case. And what that means is you'll each talk to me. The trial will be me deciding the factual issues and the legal issues. If that's the way we go, when I hear from you in 30 days, I'll either have you both on the phone or I'll have you come in again, and we'll set a schedule for a trial in this case. Well, if it's a bench trial, to me that's the same thing as a summary judgment motion, basically. I don't know that there's a need for summary judgment practice in this case. we'll set a date, and I'll talk to you about what a trial is and how you present information to me; and we'll see if we can't agree on some ground rules for how that will take place.

MS. KOO: Sure.

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THE COURT: But for now, the phase that we're in is called discovery, and all it is, is designed to make sure both sides have the information they need and nobody is surprised.

MS. KOO: Sure.

THE COURT: That's what I'd like you to do.

Now, Ms. Gutierrez, have I forgotten anything in

discovery? Obviously, I can't provide legal advice, but at least as I'm speaking, I don't want to be inaccurate. Is there anything I have omitted telling Ms. Koo about discovery?

MS. GUTIERREZ: No. Again, my only concern is that because there is such a wealth of documents, just to have whatever she pulls out and thinks, oh, I haven't shown it to Ms. Gutierrez, but if this is like something else that I did show her, if she knows that she hasn't shown it to me, make the effort to let me know.

THE COURT: Okay.

MS. GUTIERREZ: That's pretty much it.

THE COURT: Ms. Koo, anything that comes in at this trial will have to have been shown to Ms. Gutierrez beforehand.

MS. KOO: Of course. Okay.

THE COURT: Even if it looks like something you've already shown her.

MS. KOO: Sure, sure.

THE COURT: You may decide in 30 days I've got no more documents to show her, no depositions I wish to take, but I want to give you that time to think about it and look at your documents. But none of us wishes to be surprised at a trial.

MS. KOO: No problem.

THE COURT: Least of all me.

MS. KOO: Yes, I understand. I understand.

THE COURT: Then that's great.

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Anything else we should be talking about today? MS. GUTIERREZ: No. It can wait because I'm not familiar with your trial procedures, whether you do it through affidavit or you wanted live testimony, but we can obviously talk about that at the next hearing. THE COURT: Sure. Since you've asked, I do directs by affidavit and the crosses in person. That said, if that is complicated by Ms. Koo's status as a pro se litigant, I can spare the time to do both live. Doesn't matter to me. MS. GUTIERREZ: I quess we can discuss that later. THE COURT: If you'll excuse my grandmother's expression, we'll burn that bridge when we get to it. When we're done with discovery, we'll plan the trial, but I do understand your concern that you'd like to know before you step in here how my trial days go. MS. GUTIERREZ: Okav. THE COURT: That is fine. Yes, Ms. Koo, any questions you have? MS. KOO: Yes, Judge. THE COURT: Of course. MS. KOO: You said I have 30 days; right? THE COURT: Yes, ma'am. MS. KOO: Will go to March 10, around? THE COURT: Let's figure it out. Yes, it would be, actually, because February has 29 days, I think it's going to

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the 11th of March. It will be Friday, the 11th of March.
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              MS. KOO: I need instruction how to do it.
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               THE COURT: Of course.
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              MS. KOO: The second is since the business is not good
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      right now --
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              THE COURT: Yes.
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              MS. KOO: -- and I try to sublease the bar,
      everything, to at least share my rent, you know, and still not
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      working well. So I talked to the landlord. He say: You owe
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     me $310,000. How you want to pay me back? Because that's
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      during the construction, beginning when we started.
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      right now. At that time. And I say, you know, I do my best,
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      you know, to see how much permit costs, and you can use this to
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      give to the new lease to see how much counter -- and I cannot
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      close down the Koodo Sushi physically in 2015 because all of
      these debts out there. So I need to pay the sales tax, the
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      backpay. It's around 50,000.
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               THE COURT: I'm sorry. How much?
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              MS. KOO: 50,000.
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               THE COURT: Five zero?
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              MS. KOO: That one, I'm going to work hard on my life.
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      I'm going to pay it because we owe them.
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               THE COURT: Okay.
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              MS. KOO: Because in 2008 when the recession first
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      started, we wrote them a letter, you know. We couldn't pay for
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it at that time. Till right now, it's a long thing. And so we tried to close it so I have more time to deal with this one.

THE COURT: Yes.

MS. KOO: Right now I'm frustrated. Like, right now,
I need to back by 5:00 o'clock. And the one thing is I'm
leaving on March 15 and come back on April -- March 19 -March 18, come back on April 17, one month, because I'm
going -- my mom is 83 years old. I'm going to bring her to see
more of the job opportunity in New Zealand. And even though
I'm going there, I will always contact with you. If anything,
I can come back. I talk to them. I say: Look, if I'm going
to receive your job, get your job, because right now I don't
make any income --

THE COURT: Careful. You just lost your microphone.

Just bring it closer to you.

MS. KOO: Sorry. Okay. Right now I don't receive any income working so hard. I cannot survive like this. I need get an income.

THE COURT: Ms. Koo, I want to make sure I understand what you're saying. What you're saying is you're traveling with your mom for one month to explore a job opportunity for you?

MS. KOO: Two, one is New Zealand and one is

Australia. I never been there in my life. I don't know if I

can take it or not. And I don't know anyone to give me advice.

1 So, mom, go with me. She's going with me. I be back with my 2 mom together to the states on April --3 THE COURT: 17. 4 MS. KOO: -- 17, in the morning, so I can directly go 5 to work because I try to finish that way. It's too much for It's like a nightmare to me. 6 7 THE COURT: Okay. Hang on, Ms. Koo. The first part of this discussion was about how you could communicate this 8 9 information to me. Let me ask the parties, are you sharing 10 e-mails with each other or has it been all by phone? 11 MS. KOO: Yes, e-mail. 12 MS. GUTIERREZ: We've been e-mailing. 13 THE COURT: All right. Ms. Gutierrez, Ms. Koo is not 14 receiving ECF notices; correct? 15 MS. GUTIERREZ: I'm not sure. 16 THE COURT: Ms. Koo, you're not getting e-mails from 17 the court, are you? MS. KOO: I don't think so. 18 THE COURT: You'd know. You'd know. 19 20 If she were to give to you the letter on the 30th day, 21 could you send it to me, and we'll docket it or could you 22 docket it, however it works? 23 MS. GUTIERREZ: No problem. I can file it, too, if

THE COURT: That's fine. That's how it will get to

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that's what you prefer.

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MS. KOO: I let you know in one-month period of time.

I will be back. Even if I accept the job, it will be next

year, not sooner, because I have so many things here I need

taken care.

THE COURT: Yes, I understand that. Also, let's be clear. I want this information from you, but if something comes up on the work side that needs your immediate attention, I think Ms. Gutierrez and I are interested in your business remaining afloat. So you'll tell me if something —

MS. KOO: I don't understand. What is "afloat"?

THE COURT: I'm sorry. The Koodo Sushi, is it operational right now?

MS. KOO: We half operation right now.

THE COURT: Yes.

MS. KOO: Because we try to sublease everything out. When everything out, they deal with the landlord directly. I only deal with landlord with the debts, that's it.

THE COURT: Sure. Are you today delivering sushi to anybody?

MS. KOO: Yes, right now. That's why right now I need to go to work by myself.

THE COURT: Okay. We will let you go to work. Okay. I understand what you're saying. Thank you for the clarification.

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MS. KOO: I'm sorry because I just want to let you
know it's not -- I don't want to -- I just want to let you know
in advance not I'm running out or something. No, it's not.
I'm always here. The minute you ask me, I will be here. But
in this one-month period of time, I will go there, but the
earliest I make decision is -- next year we are starting over
there; this year, I need everything closed down to make sure
everything's okay at the time I'm leaving.
         THE COURT: Yes. So we would probably be meeting or
talking at the end of April when you return.
        MS. KOO: Thank you.
        THE COURT: Thank you for the clarification.
right. Please sit down.
        Let's go off the record for a minute.
         (Discussion off the record)
         THE COURT: Is there anything else we should be
talking about this afternoon?
        MS. GUTIERREZ: Nothing further, your Honor.
        THE COURT: Thank you.
        Ms. Koo, anything else?
        MS. KOO: Nothing. I just let you know my schedule.
Sorry for this. Because you told me it's one month, oh,
April 10, I'm leaving on April 18. So that's why.
         THE COURT: I completely understand. We both
appreciate you letting us know. That is fine. I'll see you in
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about two months. Thank you both.
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                MS. KOO: Thank you so much.
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                MS. GUTIERREZ: Thank you.
                (Adjourned)
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